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AUTHOR Flowers, John D.: McMillan, Frank M.
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ABSTRACT

To determine whether attitudinal differences existed between regular classroom and special education teachers toward exceptional children, a total of 100 teachers (50 from each category) were asked to respond to a semantic differential designed to provide a valid measure of attitude toward exceptional children. Multivariate analysis of variance indicated that classroom teacher attitude was significantly more positive than special education teacher attitude toward exceptional children as a whole, with the largest differences between the two groups in the categories of speech defective and mentally retarded. Low positive attitudes toward gifted children were noted for both groups. (Author/PHR)

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REGULAR CLASSROOM AND SPECIAL EDUCATION TEACHER ATTITUDES TOWARD EXCEPTIONAL CHILDREN

John D. Flowers, Ed.D.

Frank M. McMillan, Ed.D.

Augusta College

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Abstract

Fifty certified classroom teachers and fifty certified special education teachers responded to ten bi-polar adjective pairs on seven point Likert scales designed to measure attitude toward exceptional children. Multivariate analysis of variance indicated that classroom teacher attitude was significantly more positive than special education teacher attitude toward exceptional children as a whole. Classroom teacher attitude toward speech defective and mentally retarded children significantly exceeded attitudes held by special education teachers.

REGULAR CLASSROOM AND SPECIAL EDUCATION TEACHER ATTITUDES TOWARD EXCEPTIONAL CHILDREN

More regular classroom teachers will be teaching more exceptional children as a result of the passage of the 1975 Education for all Handicapped Children Act (PL94-142). Fitzpatrick and Beavers (1978) note that classroom teacher attitudes toward mainstreaming are important factors in monitoring successful implementation of the law. Thus, the need for ascertaining regular classroom teacher attitudes toward exceptional children is receiving attention (Freidson, 1965: Harasymiw & Horne, 1976).

The need to ascertain regular classroom teacher attitudes toward exceptional children is accentuated in various attitudinal studies (Haring, Stern & Cruickshank, 1958; Warren & Turner, 1966; Tringo, 1970). These studies support the belief that teacher attitudes toward exceptional children are no different from those held by the general public. This finding is particularly disturbing in light of studies which conclude that public attitude is generally negative and stereotyped (Yucker, 1965; Noonan, 1967).

A semantic differential scale was used in an attempt to differentiate between regular and special education teacher attitudes toward exceptional children (Panda & Bartel, 1972). Analysis of varience indicated no significant differences between the two groups of teachers' attitudes toward the following concepts or dependent variables: normal, gifted, mentally retarded, emotional maladjusted, delinquent, deaf, blind, epileptic, culturally deprived, speech impaired, and crippled. Results did indicate, however, that "normal" and "gifted" were rated significantly higher than the other nine variables. This study as well as most other comparative studies consist of

two or more independent variables (e.g., teacher groups, student groups) and several dependent variables (attitude scores toward various exceptionalities). According to Cooley and Lohnes (1971) and Amick and Crittenden (in Amick and Walberg, 1975, data from such studies are most appropriately treated through multivariate analysis of variance rather than independent t tests or univariate analysis of variance F tests. Futdre studies should consider the wisdom of using a multivariate design in cases where there are two or more independent and dependent variables.

Purpose

The present study was designed to ascertain regular classroom and special education teacher attitudes toward exceptional children. The purpose of the study was to determine whether attitudinal differences exist between the two groups of teachers.

It was anticipated that attitudes toward specific exceptionalities could be identified as major factors contributing to an overall difference between the two groups of teachers should one be found, using multivariate analysis of variance. That is, should classroom and special education teacher attitudes, in general, be found to differ, the specific exceptionalities responsible for the difference could be clearly identified.

Subjects

Two groups of teachers (grades 1-12) responded to a semantic differential designed to provide a valid and reliable measure of attitude toward exceptional children. A group of certified classroom teachers (N=107) enrolled in an in-service special education course required of all Georgia teachers for

certification renewal completed the instrument. The teachers had not received any instruction and had not discussed specific exceptionalities prior to responding to the instrument.

Local special education directors provided lists of 200 persons who were working with exceptional children during most of each day in public schools. The semantic differential was mailed to the population of 200 special education teachers. The urban geographical area was the same for special education and regular classroom teachers. Of 91 special education teachers who responded, 63 were certified to teach in Georgia public schools.

Data for the analysis was taken from fifty completed instruments randomly selected from each group of certified teachers. All completed instruments were not included in the study because the researchers wanted to continue gathering data for future independent studies. However, the number of cases selected is believed to be sufficient for the purpose of the present study.

Instrumentation

Osgood and Suci (1955) found that most of the variance in human semantic judgements could be accounted for by three orthogonal factors, viz., evaluative, potency, and activity. Additional factor analysis and comparisons with Thurstone and Guttman scales conducted by Osgood, Suci and Tannenbaum (1965) verify that the evaluative factor comprised of specific bi-polar adjective pairs is a valid index of attitude toward any given concept. Thus, bi-polar adjective pairs that load heavily on the evaluative factor may be used as a valid measure of teacher attitude toward concepts regarding exceptional children.

The instrument used in the present study included seven concepts or areas of exceptionality (See Table 1) identified by Kirk (1972). Each of

the seven concepts appeared on separate pages of the instrument and served as stimulus items followed by 20 bi-polar adjective pairs on 7 point Likert scales. The following adjective pairs were selected from a listing of those found to load heavily on the evaluative factor of semantic judgements described by Snider and Osgood (1969): Happy-Sad, Kind-Cruel, Fair-Unfair, Good-Bad, Nice-Awful, Pleasant-Unpleasant, Beautiful-Ugly, Relaxed-Tense, Peaceful-Ferocious, and Calm-Agitated. The preceding adjective pairs and ten buffer pairs were randomly reversed and listed after each stimulus item to diminish the phenomenon of response set.

Data generated by 50 regular classroom and 50 special education teachers were used to estimate the instrument's reliability. Mean attitude scores using unit weights for each of the teacher groups were employed to determine the proportion of error variance to total variance subtracted from unity. A total test reliability of .95 was computed for the seven exceptionalities and 70 scales comprising the instrument. Reliability coefficients for the subtests were: .85, Behavior disordered; .90, Hearing impaired; .83, Learning disabled; .87, Speech defective; .88, Mentally retarded; .87, Visually impaired; and .88, Gifted. Reliability coefficients of these magnitudes are substantially greater than the .50 considered adequate (Garrett, 1966) for purposes of making comparisons between groups.

Procedures

Responses to the instrument were coded, punched into computer cards, and verified. Seven mean attitude scores for each teacher were computed by summing scores assigned to each of ten attitude-related scales and dividing by seven. Unfavorable poles of the scales (e.g., sad, cruel, unfair, etc.) were

assigned a score of "1" and the favorable poles (e.g., happy, kind, fair, etc.) the score "7". Thus, attitude scores for a given exceptionality ranged from 7 (positive) to 1 (negative).

Mean attitude scores were analyzed through multivariate analysis of variance. Teacher groups were treated statistically as independent variables while stimulus items or areas of exceptionality were treated as dependent variables.

Findings

Data in Table 1 indicate that the grand mean (mean of all exceptionalities for each group of teachers) for regular classroom teachers ($\bar{X} = 3.86$) is marginally greater than the grand mean for special education teachers ($\bar{X} = 3.72$). However, multivariate analysis of variance of group vectors indicates that the difference is significantly different (multivariate $F_{7,92} = 3.17, p<.005$). This finding does not confirm an earlier study (Panda & Bartel, 1972) that found no significant difference between attitudes of regular classroom and special education teachers.

Univariate analysis of variance identified the exceptionalities that contributed most to the overall difference between the two groups of teachers. Table 1 indicates that regular classroom teacher attitudes toward Mentally retarded and Speech defective children are significantly more positive than attitudes held by special education teachers.

Both groups of teachers manifested least positive attitudes toward Gifted children. This finding is puzzling in view of earlier findings (Panda & Bartel, 1972) which indicated that teachers had significantly more positive attitudes toward Gifted children than other exceptionalities.

Discussion

Perhaps the lack of a more positive attitude expressed by special education teachers can be attributed to their being more realistic and more knowledgeable concerning the dynamics of exceptionality. Regular classroom teachers might be favorable until they are forced into (PL94-142), and made aware of the problems associated with having exceptional children in their classrooms.

Future research should probe the causes of regular classroom and special education teachers' relatively low positive attitudes toward Gifted children. Perhaps the reason for the low positive scores could lie within the assumption that, in general, teachers feel threatened by their brightest and most talented children.

The instrument used in the study simply asked teachers to respond to a number of scales with regards to their perception of specified exceptionalities. Future study should examine the effects of teacher perceptions of the same exceptionalities with the assumption that any or all of the exceptionalities could (would) be placed in their classrooms.

That regular classroom teachers are not "turned off" by exceptional children is a particularly positive note in view of the increasing influx of exceptional children into regular school classrooms. That regular classroom teacher mean attitude scores are not significantly less than special education teacher attitude scores suggests that implementation of mainstreaming is not being strongly impeded by classroom teacher attitude toward exceptional children. It seems that administrative concern should focus less on teacher attitude toward exceptional children and more on supportive services needed by regular classroom teachers who find steadily increasing numbers of exceptional children in their classrooms.

Table 1

Mean Attitude Scores

Exceptionality	Teacher	
	Regular	Special
Behavior disordered	4.92	5.05
Learning disabled	3.88	3.89
Speech defective	3.85 ($F_{1,98}$=5.0)[a]	3.48
Hearning impaired	3.79	3.48
Mentally retarded	3.77 ($F_{1,98}$=8.5)[b]	3.24
Visually impaired	3.76	3.66
Gifted	3.08	3.21
Grand Mean	3.86 ($F_{7,92}$=3.17)[c]	3.72

a,b univariate analysis of variance $p < .05$

c multivariate analysis of variance $p < .005$

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